Using Federal Census Resources

in the

California History Room
California State Library

The California History Room has the federal census schedules on microfilm for the years 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930, **for California only**.

1850, 1860, 1870

These census years have **print indexes**, which are located on the census shelf in the Genealogy Alcove. The 1850 census has two indexes, one by county and one statewide.

To use the print indexes:
1. Look up the surname, and locate the proper person by first name and age.
2. Write down the **county** and **all of the numbers** given, along with what each number represents (page, enumeration district, etc.), or photocopy the page.
3. In the microfilm room, locate the drawers for the census year.
4. Find the census reel for the county and enumeration district given in the index.
5. Search the reel for the enumeration district, page, and any other numbers from the index.

We also have electronic indexes for California and other western states for both the 1850 and 1860 censuses.

> *Note:* The **1850 census** lacks the counties of Contra Costa, San Francisco, and Santa Clara.

1880, 1900, 1910, 1920
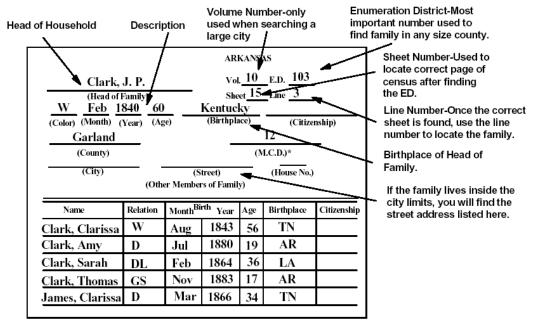
These census years have **Soundex indexes.**

The Soundex is a coded surname (last name) index based on the way a surname sounds rather than the way it is spelled. Surnames that sound the same, but are spelled differently, like SMITH and SMYTH, have the same code and are filed together. Every Soundex code consists of a letter and three numbers, such as W-123 (Webster). The letter is always the first letter of the surname.

To use the Soundex indexes:
1. In the *Soundex Reference Guide* (located on the top of the reference book shelves), find the Soundex code for the surname.
2. In the microfilm room, locate the drawers for the census year and find the Soundex reel (16mm, skinny reel) that contains the code you want.
3. Locate the code on the reel. **Within the code, names are arranged by first name**. (Ignore the surnames.) Locate the proper person by first name and age.
4. Write down the **county** and **all of the numbers** given, along with what each number represents (page, enumeration district, etc.), or print a copy of the card.
5. Find the census reel for the county and enumeration district given in the index.
6. Search the reel for the enumeration district, page, and any other key numbers from the index.

Example of a Soundex card from the 1900 census

The 1880 and 1920 Soundex cards are very similar to this, but they give ages instead of birth months and years.

Head of Household

Description

Volume Number-only used when searching a large city

Enumeration District-Most important number used to find family in any size county.

Sheet Number-Used to locate correct page of census after finding the ED.

Line Number-Once the correct sheet is found, use the line number to locate the family.

Birthplace of Head of Family.

If the family lives inside the city limits, you will find the street address listed here.

ARKANSAS

Clark, J. P.
(Head of Family)

Vol. 10 E.D. 103

Sheet 15 Line 3

W   Feb   1840   60
(Color) (Month) (Year) (Age)

Kentucky
(Birthplace)

(Citizenship)

Garland
(County)

12

(City)

(M.C.D.)*

(Street)   (House No.)

(Other Members of Family)

Name	Relation	Month	Birth Year	Age	Birthplace	Citizenship
Clark, Clarissa	W	Aug	1843	56	TN	
Clark, Amy	D	Jul	1880	19	AR	
Clark, Sarah	DL	Feb	1864	36	LA	
Clark, Thomas	GS	Nov	1883	17	AR	
James, Clarissa	D	Mar	1866	34	TN	

The **1910 census** has a Miracode index, which looks different from the Soundex but is used exactly the same way.

The **1880 Soundex** includes only families with children 10 years of age and under. If your family does not fall into this category, try using the index to the of 1880 census transcription which we have on CD-ROM.

1890

The 1890 census was destroyed in a fire. The *California 1890 great register of voters index* helps to fill the gap. The 3-volume index is located in our Genealogy Alcove, call number JK8791 C244 2001. However, since women could not vote in 1890, the index lists men only.

1930

California is not one of the states that have Soundex for the 1930 census. However, the California History Room has a tip sheet to walk you through the process, as well as several tools to assist with the search:

- Our rich collection of city directories and telephone directories can provide ancestor addresses.
- Our historical map collection can provide cross-street information.
- Web sites that help identify enumeration districts are bookmarked on our Internet access computers.
- Enumeration district maps and enumeration district descriptions are available on microfilm.

Nonpopulation Schedules—1850, 1860, 1870, 1880

Also known as partial or special schedules, these provide details on agriculture, manufacturing, products of industry, social statistics, and mortality. They are can be found on Microfilm 130, 132, 133, in the first drawer of census microfilm.